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**Annie Ballweg: She helps runners train for races**

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**Emily Harkins**  
Tribune Correspondent

Local businesswoman Annie Ballweg has been a member of the Waunakee community for five years but has been a part of the larger vicinity for much longer. Besides a longtime connection to the Madison area, where both her family and her in-laws reside, Ballweg has lived on both the East and West coasts of America. Ultimately, she came back to Wisconsin to make her home in Waunakee, where she has started a family and a successful business.

Ballweg grew up in Madison and dated her future husband, Sam, in high school. After graduation, Ballweg went to Fairfield University in Connecticut on a volleyball scholarship. After an injury that kept her from playing, Ballweg returned to Wisconsin and attended UW-Madison where she completed her undergraduate degree.

During that time, Ballweg's future husband, Sam, was attending Boston College in Boston, Mass., and Ballweg visited him several times. Ballweg liked the city and was familiar with it from her visits and from spending a summer there before completing her undergraduate degree.

Boston University had a great master's program in counseling, so Ballweg once more packed her bags for the East coast.

Ballweg enjoyed her time in Boston. She appreciated the history and culture of the city, and the accessibility, a "big city that functions as a small town," she said.

Boston University is right next to Fenway Park, where Ballweg saw several Red Sox games. Ballweg praised the restaurants and public transportation in Boston, noting that her apartment was "right on the T line," using the local nickname for the train that runs through Boston. While studying for her master's in counseling, Ballweg, at the time still Annie Richert, got engaged to Sam Ballweg.

Ballweg chose her career in part because of a high school counselor who was a mentor and an inspiration to her.

Ballweg commented, "I inherently like people, and just generally like to help others."

While in Boston, Ballweg had the opportunity to work as a counselor for children before getting a job as a high school counselor in Malibu, Calif., where she had a case load of between 350 and 400 students. Ballweg said there was a world of difference between her experience in Boston and Malibu. In Boston, Ballweg worked directly with parents who highly valued education. In Malibu, a community where the money is rooted in "the industry," or Hollywood, Ballweg was more likely to have direct contact with nannies, and preparing kids for college was not as high a priority. The two communities had different cultures with different values.

"I really enjoyed working on both ends of the spectrum," Ballweg said. "There was a big dichotomy between the two. They challenged me in different ways."

Ballweg worked in Malibu for two years, commuting from Santa



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Monica and the home she shared with Sam, whom she had married in Wisconsin in 2003. Although the commute was long, Ballweg said, "My drive to work every day was looking at the ocean, and I can't complain about that."

With the highway right on coast, Ballweg said she sometimes would be waiting at a stop light and look over and see dolphins leaping out of the water.

It was during her time in California that Ballweg and her husband got involved with a running group called the Nike Running Club. Ballweg was a run leader. The group had several weekly runs to prepare for races. Nike provided the leaders with all their gear and sponsored the weekly training runs and races. Ballweg joined the LA Triathlon Club too, and this inspired her to get certified as a trainer through the American Counsel of Exercise.

When Ballweg came back to Wisconsin in 2004, she worked as a long-term substitute for the academic advisor to student athletes at UW Madison. She was in charge of the men's and women's swimming teams and crew teams.

"I really loved that, because it meshed together the academic and counseling world with the athletic and sports world," she said.

The long-term sub job lasted about a year, and then Ballweg started her own company at the end of 2005, Train 2 Race, LLC. To get the word out, Ballweg put flyers in goodie bags for runners at various area races like the Berbee Derby in Fitchburg, Wis.

Family and friends spread the word too, but what really made her business, a Web-based business, take off were two interviews she gave on triathlon-focused podcasts. After that, the word was out on the Internet that train2race.com was the place to go for a personalized training program for racing.

One thing Ballweg loves about having an Internet business is that there are no boundaries. Ballweg has clients all over the world for whom she customizes programs to prepare for any type of race they're planning. She has a large contingency in Bermuda, where there are very few running coaches and no triathlon shops.

After an initial phone call to get specific information on a client's goals, time commitments, personal history and abilities, Ballweg builds a customized program which she then send in a series of emails. Education on nutrition, hydration and how to become a better athlete are high priorities in Ballweg's business, and her weekly e-mails to clients include not only their personal training plan for the next week, but also an article on strength training and a "topic of the week" article.

Ballweg's program gets results. Everyone she has trained for the Iron Man Triathlon in Kona, Hawaii, for example, has not only qualified to enter but has finished. Despite the amount of time and effort involved, Ballweg says of her online business, "I don't really consider it work. It's just something I love to do."

The other great thing about running an internet business, according to Ballweg, is being able to work from home and take care of her son, Michael.

Ballweg is expecting twins in October, even more reason to work from home. That isn't all she will be busy with this fall. Ballweg is also the race director in Waunakee for Girls on the Run, which will have its first race in November. The boys and girls who sign up for this 10-week program will be fortunate to have the experience and enthusiasm of Annie Ballweg.